

REMARKS

Claims 1-9 were previously canceled. In this amendment, claims 10, 12, 14-16, and 18-22 have been amended. Claims 11, 13, and 17 have been canceled, and new claims 23-27 have been added. Claims 10, 12, 14-16, and 18-27 therefore are pending and presented for review. Favorable reconsideration and allowance are requested in light of the foregoing amendments and remarks which follow.

1. Drawings

The drawings stand objected to for failing to show claim subject matter. This drawing objection is believed to have been rendered moot by the amendments to the claims. Specifically,

- ◆ Claim 17 has been canceled, thereby omitting reference in the claims to "sensitive outer surface covering the cumulative surfaces of two side ends of the first device";
- ◆ The claims have been amended to consistently use terminology found in the specification with clear reference to the drawings, including
 - a "sleeve" 15, described, e.g., on lines 28-31 of page 4 of the specification and seen in Figs. 2a-2d,
 - a "first or inner sheath" 21, described, e.g., on lines 17-22 of page 5 of the specification and seen in Figs. 2b and 2c, and
 - a "second or outer sheath" 25, described, e.g., on line 25 of page 5 through line 1 of page 6 of the specification and seen in Fig. 2d of the drawings.

In light of the foregoing, withdrawal of the drawing objection is respectfully requested.

2. Specification

The title and Abstract have been amended as requested by the Examiner. The claims have also been amended to include terminology consistent with that used in the specification, hence mooting the objection for failing to provide antecedent base for the claimed subject matter. The specification has also been amended at page 5 to provide *ipsis verbis* support for the "inner" sheath and "outer" sheath. The disclosed relationship between the sheath is self evidence with the remaining of the disclosure and the drawings, no new matter has been added.

3. Claim Objections

Claim 13 is objected to because of the term "ferrule" was misspelled. This objection has been mooted by the cancellation of claim 13.

4. Claim Rejections Under 35 USC §112, second paragraph

Claims 13-22 stand rejected under 35 USC §112, second paragraph, for using the terms "shaft", "first protective shaft", "second protective shaft", etc., which were inconsistent with terminology in the specification, allegedly creating an ambiguity in the claims. This rejection has been overcome through the amendment of the claims to use terminology consistent with that found throughout the specification.

The Examiner indicated that claims 13-22 have not been examined for patentability over the prior art since the scope of the claims could not be determined. This was improper. The claims were sufficiently definite that, when read in light of the specification, their meaning could be understood with a sufficient degree of precision to permit examination on their merits. Under such circumstances, the Examiner is required to construe the claims as best he can and to render a decision based on patentability of the prior art in order to avoid piecemeal examination. See MPEP 2173.06. Should the Examiner reject any of claims 14-16 and 18-22 in the next Office Action, he is requested *not* to make that rejection final.

5. Claim Rejection - 35 USC §102(b)

Claims 10-12 stand rejected under 35 USC §102(b) as being clearly anticipated by U.S. Patent 5,652,814 to Pan et al ("Pan"). This rejection, insofar as it may be applied against amended claim 10, is respectfully traversed.

Amended Claim 10 recites, *inter alia*, an optical coupler including a plurality of optical fibers each having a second end connected to a first device such as a transmitter and a first end connected to at least one other device such as a receiver. The second ends are juxtaposed in the first device, and a sleeve surrounds the second ends such that a stripped portion of each of the plurality of fibers protrudes from the sleeve. A first, heat-shrinkable sheath surrounds a stripped portion of each of the optical fibers that extends from the sleeve to a portion of each of the optical fibers that is not stripped. An exemplary sheath constructed in this manner is seen at 21 in Fig. 2a and covers the stripped or bared fiber optic portion 17 and 18 that protrude from the sleeve 15. In the thus configured coupling, the heat-shrinkable sheath keeps the second ends of the fibers side-by-side and prevents them from being distorted when they are guided into the sleeve.

In contrast, the Pan patent lacks anything resembling the claimed heat shrinkable sheath. The fibers 30 and 31 instead extend away from the sleeve 33 without a heat shrinkable sheath or any other covering overlying stripped portions of the fibers that extend from the sleeve 33 to non-stripped portions of the fibers. In fact, it appears that the fiber portions that extend from the sleeve 33 are not stripped. Claim 10 therefore is novel over Pan and is believed to be in *prima facia* condition for allowance.

Claim 12, the only other claim rejected based on prior art, is believed to be allowable for incorporating the limitations of claim 10 by reference.

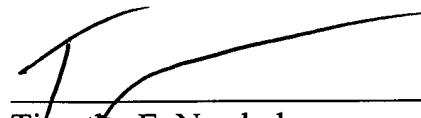
Claims 14-16, 18-22, and new claims 23-27 are believed to be allowable for reciting subject matter not disclosed in Pan.

6. Conclusion

In light of the foregoing, consideration and allowance of all claims are believed to be in order and are respectfully requested. Should there be any remaining questions the attending to of which would expedite such action, the Examiner is requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number appearing below.

Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$450 for the government filing fee by a large entity for a 2-month extension of time, which applicant hereby requests. No additional fee is believed to be payable with this communication. Nevertheless, should the Examiner consider any other fees to be payable in conjunction with this or any future communication, the Director is authorized to direct payment of such fees, or credit any overpayment to Deposit Account No. 50-1170.

Respectfully submitted,



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